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by Billy Coleburn

Participation in Saturday's COVID testing clinic at Nottoway High School was impressive. I haven't seen a line of cars that long here in Nottoway County since Lynyrd Skynyrd played in Crewe in May 2012, or when Alabama played at Pickett in June 1988. It almost looked like the McDonald's drive-thru around lunchtime in Blackstone.

A total of 321 area residents were tested Saturday, which fell way short of the 377 who were tested in Lunenburg four weeks earlier. But hey, it was much hotter Saturday in Nottoway, so we're gonna call it a tie and let *The Big Game* and River Cup decide which county is best. Sadly, one of Virginia's best high school football rivalries won't be played this calendar year. From what I hear, high school football is now going to start in February or March?

I've been told that folks who were tested Saturday won't get their results back until next week. That's a long time to wait. Let's say your results come back Positive. Meanwhile, how many people, potentially, are you now infecting during the 10-day waiting period for your results? That's why we should wear our masks in public places and continue to practice social distancing. Not for ourselves but for others. Compassion. Courtesy. Consideration. I'm 51, and I remember a time when Americans were known for those qualities. Self-government requires self-discipline.

I hope all of our readers have recovered from last week's edition -- particularly members of the Nottoway Board of Supervisors. Whew, what a meeting! Now it looks like the Courthouse Complex Committee of Steve Bowen and Lynn Shekleton is going to meet tomorrow to discuss the future of the Confederate Memorial in front of the Court House. As I've said earlier, Sarah Allen of Crewe isn't asking for the rebel statue to be taken down and melted. She and others would like to see it moved from in front of Nottoway County's Courthouse and relocated to a more appropriate place. Nottoway County has an easy solution with privately-owned Old Brick Church -- where the Nottoway Grays prayed and mustered -- just up the street. I suspect you might hear cost figures and other facts and options -- not opinions -- from the committee tomorrow. Hopefully, we can resolve this issue without further division. I mean, it's not like we don't have a pandemic and potential economic ruin to worry about.

With that said, I oppose renaming Washington & Lee University. General Lee res-

(More AROUND TOWN, page 5)



Pandemic Patience

The Piedmont Health District reports that 321 area residents participated Saturday in a free drive-thru COVID-19 testing event at Nottoway High School. "We greatly appreciate everyone's support in the process along with the patience of those that came out to be tested. It was a hot day," said District Emergency Coordinator David Martin. There were 115 cars in line at 10:15 a.m. when *The Courier-Record* captured these images.

FASTC LODGING SOUGHT

State Dept. spending millions on hotels and commuting

LEGISLATION COULD LEAD TO ROOMS AT PICKETT

U. S. Rep. Abigail Spanberger (VA-7) wants to know how much the State Dept. is spending to lodge and shuttle trainees to the new Foreign Affairs Security Training Center (FASTC) at Fort Pickett.

Nine years after FASTC was first announced for Pickett, and eight months after the \$450 million State Dept. facility opened, there is still no new hotel in Nottoway County to accommodate the projected 10,000 trainees per year.

Most are having to stay in Richmond, Petersburg, Farmville, and other areas and commute daily to Pickett -- costing more time than FASTC planners anticipated.

Legislation that passed the House of Representatives last Friday, with bipartisan support, directs the Secretary of State "not later than 45 days after enactment of this Act -- to submit to the Committees on Appropriations a report detailing training costs -- including costs associated with transporting personnel to the facility and per diem to house trainees offsite."

The Spanberger-backed legislation also suggests the possibility of onsite housing. A 450-

room FASTC dormitory was eliminated from plans when the project was downsized in 2013 from \$960 million to \$450 million.

"Such report," the legislation continues, "shall also include a review of options to house trainees closer to the facility, including -- after consultation with the Secretary of Defense -- the Privatized Army Lodging Program, and the viability, cost, and benefit of each option."

No Local Hotel

In January, FASTC planners told Blackstone Town Council that -- this year alone -- FASTC will need 81,720 hotel nights to house its trainees. At \$90.00 per night, that equates to \$7.3 million just for lodging.

Currently, the State Dept. is renting those rooms at 13 different hotels in Farmville, Short Pump, Midlothian, Richmond, Glen Allen, and Colonial Heights.

FASTC is eager to rent rooms closer to Pickett and to start buying less gas. Plus, from Blackstone's standpoint, those trainees lodging outside the community don't have time to come to town for dinner.

FASTC this fiscal year will train 8,675 trainees, and 10,000 per year are expected in following years. Courses range in length from three days to 17 weeks, with 90% of those courses lasting about a week.

VUMAC Moving Forward

The good news for Black-

stone and FASTC is that plans are moving forward to renovate the former Virginia United Methodist Assembly Center. The 1922 Blackstone College building and 11.5 acres were recently sold by Louis DeNitto to Blackstone Hotel Partners, LLC of Chester for \$875,000.

That LLC is affiliated with Kalyan Hospitality (Nick and Raj Patel), which earlier this year received re-zoning approval from Town Council to accommodate a planned \$10 million venture to renovate the facility and transform it into a 110-room boutique hotel with restaurant, brewery, theater, gift shop, and movie theater.

Town Backing

Blackstone Town Council last week voted 7-0 to apply to the state for \$600,000 in Industrial Revitalization Funds on behalf of the venture. A resolution states that the company is also planning to borrow an additional \$6.4 million and spend another \$1.5 million in personal capital to make the "VUMAC Hotel Adaptive-Reuse 2020 project" a reality.

The Town resolution states further, "It is projected that 25 full-time equivalent positions, such as housekeeping, food/beverage, and maintenance will result."

Blackstone is also working with Nottoway County on an application for additional funds from the Virginia Tobacco Commission.

FASTC was first announced for Pickett in July 2011 and the \$450 million fa-

MONUMENTAL ASSIGNMENT

Nottoway duo to discuss rebel statue at courthouse

Helen Simmons made it clear that she didn't want a committee to study the Confederate Memorial in front of Nottoway Courthouse.

But now the Board of Supervisors Chair has asked that the Board's Courthouse Complex/Landfill Committee offer a report or recommendation in time for the Board's Aug. 20th meeting.

That Board committee -- comprised of District One Supervisor Steve Bowen and District Five Supervisor Lynn Shekleton -- is scheduled to meet tomorrow (Thursday, July 30th) at 5:30 p.m. in the County Administrator's Office.

"Two white people" is how Bowen described the committee's racial make-up at the Board's July 16th meeting. Bowen expressed concern about the optics and long-term outcome of a decision split along racial lines, saying such would cause a further divide.

"Let's suppose we vote tonight," Bowen said during the July 16th discussion, "and the three Caucasians vote one way, and the two African-Americans vote another way. We will have caused MORE DIVIDE. We will have made it a racial thing. I don't want it to be a racial thing. I want it to be THE RIGHT THING."

Chair Ms. Simmons wanted a vote that night to remove the monument, but Supervisor John Roark asked her to consider forming a committee



UNVEILED IN 1893

The Ladies Memorial Association of Nottoway erected this statue in 1893 to honor all from Nottoway County who served the Confederacy. The names of those men are inscribed on the base of the statue.

of both monument opponents and local descendants of those whose names are inscribed on the 1893 Memorial. Supervisor Roark said he believes the two groups can find common ground.

Ms. Simmons said the Board already has "enough committees...Are we gonna form a committee for everything here in Nottoway County?"

Ms. Simmons apparently reconsidered her stance after the board's meeting. Supervisors that night heard from 11 speakers on the monument -- six asked officials to remove and relocate it, while five asked that it remain where it's stood for 127 years.

A letter from County Administrator Ronnie Roark to the committee -- relaying Ms. Simmons' wishes -- was sent July 20th -- the 127th anniversary of the monument's dedication.

(See **MONUMENT**, page A-2)

COVID BY CO: 321 tested Saturday at event in Nottoway

The latest reported COVID-19 case numbers for our area, as of 10 a.m. yesterday morning (Tuesday, July 28th), according to the Virginia Dept. of Health:

Nottoway: 168 cases (up from 152 last week and 124 the prior week), 40 hospitalizations, 6 deaths.

A total of 321 area residents participated Saturday in a free drive-thru COVID testing event this past Saturday, July 25th, from 10-2 at Nottoway High.

Lunenburg: 52 cases, 4 hospitalizations, 0 deaths.

Amelia: 71 cases, 13 hospitalizations, 1 death.

Brunswick: 184 cases, 23 hospitalizations, 1 death.

Dinwiddie: 193 cases, 30 hospitalizations, 2 deaths.

Prince Edward: 284 cases, 27 hospitalizations, 6 deaths.

Mecklenburg: 297 cases, 34 hospitalizations, 30 deaths.

Chesterfield: 3,796 cases, 205 hospitalizations, 66 deaths.

STATEWIDE: 86,994 cases, 7,686 hospitalizations, 2,095 deaths.